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Source: *Social Problems*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (February 2013), pp. 81-99

Published by: [University of California Press](#) on behalf of the [Society for the Study of Social Problems](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/sp.2013.60.1.81>

Accessed: 17/04/2013 08:56

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# Class in Name Only: Subjective Class Identity, Objective Class Position, and Vote Choice in American Presidential Elections

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*Partly because of the widespread tendency for Americans to think of themselves as “middle class,” subjective class identity often does not correspond to objective class position. This study evaluates the extent to which American voters’ subjective class identities differ from their objective class positions. We then evaluate the implications of such differences for voting behavior using American National Election Studies data from eight recent presidential elections. Coding respondents according to whether subjective class identity is higher or lower than objective class position, we construct a novel schema of inflated, deflated, and concordant class perceptions. We find that there are substantial differences between Americans’ subjective and objective social class: over two-thirds of the upper-middle class have a deflated perception of their class position, only half of the middle class have concordant perceptions, and more than a third of the working class have inflated perceptions. We also find that this divergence varies depending on sociodemographic factors, and especially race and education. The analyses initially show a pattern that those with inflated class perceptions are more likely to vote Republican. However, this relationship is not significant once we control for race and income. Keywords: social class; class identification; voting; race and class; American politics.*

One of the enduring findings of research on ideology is that most Americans think of themselves as middle class (Hout 2008; Jackman and Jackman 1983). Given the substantial economic inequality in American society, this raises the question of how well Americans’ subjective class identities actually correspond with an objective measure of their social class position. By subjective class identities we refer to the categories individuals choose when asked to place themselves into a social class (Centers 1949; Evans, Kelley, and Kolosi 1992; Goldthorpe et al. 1969). By objective class position we refer to a person’s life chances as defined by his or her occupation, skills, authority, economic interests, and market situation (Giddens 1973). Scholars have developed several explanations for the process of class identification in modern society (Evans and Kelley 2004; Stuber 2006; Wright 1997). However, much less attention has been devoted to explaining why some people form class identities that are consistent with their objective class positions while others do not. Further, the consequences of forming a class identity that diverges from one’s objective experience remain unclear.

The divergence between subjective and objective class has the potential to be especially relevant to the study of class voting. Research on class voting examines the effect that a person’s

The authors wish to thank Jason Beckfield, Phil Morgan, Rashawn Ray, Bill Tobin, Bruce Western, and the editors and reviewers at *Social Problems* for suggestions. The authors also thank Suzanne Shanahan for providing support for this research. Direct correspondence to: Benjamin Sosnaud, Department of Sociology, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA 02138. E-mail: bsosnaud@fas.harvard.edu.

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objective class position has on his or her vote choice. Indeed, an extensive literature has demonstrated the continued relevance of class voting (e.g., Brady, Sosnaud, and Frenk 2009; Heath 2009; Manza and Brooks 1999). Further, the outpouring of news stories and related commentaries highlighting the key role that working-class voters played in the 2008 U.S. election indicate that interest in class voting remains strong (Bartels 2008; Frank 2004). Nevertheless, there has been no research on the electoral implications of the divergence between subjective and objective class. Given evidence that class identity originates in a confluence of attitudes and environments (Evans and Kelley 2004, Lamont 1992; 2000; Savage 2000; Stuber 2006), subjective class is also likely to be highly relevant to voting behavior. Moreover, the divergence between subjective class identity and objective class position has the potential to be an important element in the relationship between class and voting.

In this article, we analyze survey data from eight recent U.S. presidential elections to evaluate the extent and origins of the differences between subjective class identifications and objective social class positions. We construct a schema of concordant, deflated, and inflated social class. We then assess whether these divergences between objective and subjective class are associated with vote choice. Overall, this article investigates two related questions. First, what is the extent of discordance between objective and subjective measures of class in the United States? Second, does discordance predict voting behavior? In the sections that follow, we discuss theoretical reasons for examining the difference between subjective and objective class and how this bears on voting. We then explain our methods and report the results before concluding.

## Theoretical Background

### *Subjective and Objective Class*

Max Weber's definition of class continues to be a source of inspiration for class analysis (e.g., Chan and Goldthorpe 2007; but cf. Wright 2005). According to Weber ([1922] 1968:927), a group of people belong to a class when they "have in common a specific casual component of their life chances," that is directly related to economic interests, including their property, income, and market situation. For Weber, and unlike some other class analytic approaches (Wright 2005), belonging to a social class does not necessarily require class consciousness or class-based action. Instead, class can shape life chances simply by influencing one's experiences, opportunities, and constraints (Weber [1922] 1968). This distinction is salient because it suggests that social class can exert a significant effect even in a country like the United States where people report low levels of class consciousness (Verba and Schlozman 1977) and often identify with classes that do not correspond to their objective life chances.

Indeed, an extensive literature shows that Americans of all economic backgrounds tend to subjectively identify with the middle class (Adair 2001). When respondents are asked to self-report their class with an open-ended question, a majority describe themselves as middle class (Hout 2008; Kahl and Davis 1955). When respondents are asked to rank themselves on a scale of several specified class categories, the exact portion placing themselves in this group fluctuates, yet a bias towards the middle remains. Richard Centers' (1949) classic study demonstrates that when asked to choose from three categories (upper, middle, and lower class), about 80 percent of respondents place themselves in the middle class. In contrast, when the category "working class" is added to this list, the majority will typically split between the middle and working class (Adair 2001; Davis and Robinson 1988; Hout 2008). Following Tom Smith (1986), M. D. R. Evans and Jonathan Kelley (2004) ask respondents to rank themselves on an unlabeled ten-point scale without specified classes. With this measure, a majority place themselves in the middle position of the scale and 65 percent of Americans group themselves in the fourth, fifth, or sixth stratum.

The fact that Americans consistently place themselves in the middle of the social hierarchy independent of the class position associated with their life chances has had a significant impact

on modern class analysis. Although a few continue to measure social class with subjective self-reports (Carmines and Stanley 1992), most utilize objective measures of class position. Some rely on income as a proxy for class (Stonecash 2000) while others define class based on education (Bartels 2006; 2008). Most conventional in the class-voting literature is Robert Erikson and John Goldthorpe's (1992a) occupation-based schema, which aggregates occupations with common market and work situations.

Partly because of the widespread tendency for Americans to identify with the middle class, subjective class identity often does not correspond to the objective class position associated with people's life chances. Even with broad transformations in the nation's labor market such as the decline of manufacturing (Bluestone and Harrison 2000), subjective class perceptions have remained remarkably stable over the last half-century (Centers 1949; Evans and Kelley 2004). Moreover, recent studies showing that the majority of Americans continue to identify themselves as middle class (Adair 2001; Bottero 2004) are difficult to reconcile with well-established trends like rising inequality, the stagnation of wages and household incomes, and increasing economic insecurity (Bluestone and Harrison 2000; Morris and Western 1999; Western et al. 2012). Finally, there is substantial evidence that subjective class is more a measure of social-psychological identity than a report of one's objective class position (Adair 2001; Vanneman and Cannon 1987; Wright 1997; but cf. Jackman and Jackman 1983; Simpson, Stark, and Jackson 1988).

Social scientists have developed several explanations for why Americans subjectively identify with certain social classes. Some argue that class categories like lower or working class have politically charged meanings that bias how people think of themselves (Kelley and Evans 1995). A related explanation holds that the prevalence of egalitarian norms discourage Americans from categorizing themselves as "upper" or "lower" (Adair 2001). Building on Elizabeth Bott (1957), Evans and Kelley (2004) claim that immediate surroundings have a strong impact. Since people in high ranking classes often inhabit elite networks, they are likely to only interact with those at the top of the social hierarchy (Wright 1997). Similarly, lower-class people can usually find others who appear to be worse off. Thus, people see themselves in a mid-level position within their particular, local-social structure (Evans and Kelley 2004; Evans, Kelley, and Kolosi 1992).

Others focus on the cultural construction of class boundaries. Michèle Lamont (2000) shows how working-class men differentiate themselves from those in higher classes by criticizing their superficiality and lack of integrity. Lamont also emphasizes the role of race, demonstrating that white workers associate being poor with being African American while African Americans distance themselves from the perceived egoism of the middle-class whites (Lamont 2000; Lamont and Molnár 2002; see also Halle 1984). Jenny Stuber (2005, 2006) suggests that as a result of egalitarian norms emphasizing modesty and humility, a desire to distance oneself from the upper class is not limited to the working class. She finds that new entrants into the middle and upper-middle class often identify and maintain a sense of solidarity with the working class (Stuber 2005) and that upper-middle-class college students actually draw stronger boundaries between themselves and those above than those below (Stuber 2006). Others suggest that people are disinclined to identify as working class. There is evidence that upper-class individuals do place significant emphasis on the distinctions between themselves and those of lower status (Gorman 2000; Lamont 1992). For example, some argue that manual labor has come to be seen as "subordinate and dependent" (Bottero 2004; Savage 2000).

Ultimately, this research helps to explain why subjective class identities might differ from objective class positions and emphasizes the salience of whether people identify with classes above or below their position in the class hierarchy. Despite the contributions of these literatures, the divergence between subjective class identity and objective class position is not well understood. Of course, many *do* form class identities that are consistent with their objective position in the class structure (Hout 2008; Morris and Jeffries 1970). Yet, exploring the differences between subjective class identities and objective class positions could explain how both relate to behavior. Theories of social class have linked both subjective and objective class to behaviors like consumption, labor market activity, and vote choice. For example, Michael Hout (2008) examines the relationship

between subjective class identity and homeownership, leisure, and political participation. However, such research does not account for potential discrepancies between subjective and objective class. A few scholars have compared objective and subjective class, but only while pursuing other research questions such as evaluating class measurement (Evans and Mills 1998) and comparing differences in identification between sexes (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992b). Thus, an important next step is to understand the behavioral ramifications of the divergence between subjective class identity and objective class position.

### *Class Voting*

Scholars have long been interested in how objective class shapes vote choice. Traditional theories of class voting were based on the premise that working-class Americans voted Democratic and that the upper class voted Republican because of the parties' opposing economic platforms (Campbell et al. 1960; Lipset 1960). Following Nixon's success in mobilizing his so-called "silent majority" of white working-class males, many investigated whether the working class was moving away from the Democratic Party (e.g., Glenn 1973; Ladd and Hadley 1975). The weakening of Democratic support among the white working class inspired an exploration of the purported demise of traditional class voting (e.g., Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 2002; Carmines and Stanley 1992; Manza and Brooks 1999).<sup>1</sup> However, others suggest that working-class voters have maintained their Democratic loyalties (Brewer and Stonecash 2001; Stonecash et al. 2000). For instance, Larry Bartels (2006, 2008) claims that the white working class has not abandoned the Democratic Party and that economics continue to drive working-class voting.

While such debates have led some scholars to argue that class voting is in decline (Clark and Lipset 2001; Hechter 2004), others advocate for a more nuanced approach that moves beyond working-class dealignment. Michael Hout, Clem Brooks, and Jeff Manza (1995) find that although white working-class voters are becoming less Democratic, class continues to be important. Using a relative class-voting index, they show that class remained a significant predictor of voting (see also Manza and Brooks 1999). Thus, while "traditional class voting" may have declined, social class remains strongly associated with vote choice. Subsequent research has corroborated these conclusions and added complexity to theories of class and voting (e.g., Brady et al. 2009; Evans 1999, 2000; Manza and Brooks 1999; van der Waal, Achterberg, and Houtman 2007).

Despite the contributions of research on class voting, there has been no research on the electoral implications of the divergence between subjective and objective class. Stuber (2006), Evans and Kelley (2004), and others (Lamont 1992, 2000; Savage 2000) find that the distance between subjective and objective class originates in a confluence of attitudes and environments. Since such factors are highly relevant to voting behavior, the distinction between subjective class identity and objective class position has the potential to be an important element in the relationship between class and voting.

### *Subjective and Objective Class and Vote Choice*

We compare subjective class identity against objective class position in order to assess the extent of any difference between the two. For those with a discrepancy between objective and subjective class, we distinguish whether they identify with a class above or below their objective class. As shown in Table 1, we categorize people as working, middle, and upper-middle class.<sup>2</sup> We describe those whose subjective class identity corresponds to their objective class position as

1. These studies of working-class dealignment from the Democratic Party utilize a variety of different measures of class. Abramson and colleagues (2002) define the working class as manual workers, Manza and Brooks (1999) employ a version of the Erikson-Goldthorpe schema, and Carmines and Stanley (1992) utilize income and subjective class identification.

2. These are the categories included in the American National Election Study's measure of subjective class identity (see below).

**Table 1 • Schema of Possible Differences between Subjective Class Identification and Objective Class Position**

	<i>Subjective Working-Class Identity</i>	<i>Subjective Middle-Class Identity</i>	<i>Subjective Upper-Middle-Class Identity</i>
Objective working-class position	<i>Concordant class identity</i>	<i>Inflated class identity</i>	<i>Inflated class identity</i>
Objective middle-class position	<i>Deflated class identity</i>	<i>Concordant class identity</i>	<i>Inflated class identity</i>
Objective upper-middle-class position	<i>Deflated class identity</i>	<i>Deflated class identity</i>	<i>Concordant class identity</i>

having a “concordant” class perception. We classify people who have subjective class identities that are higher than their objective class position as having “inflated” class perceptions. Finally, those with class identities below their objective class position have “deflated” class perceptions.<sup>3</sup>

After assessing the extent to which subjective class identities diverge from objective class positions, we assess the social and demographic characteristics of those who inflate or deflate. This analysis builds on analyses of how well objective class predicts subjective class (e.g., Hout 2008; Kelley and Evans 1995). Such studies examine the marginal effects of sociodemographic characteristics for subjective class, after controlling for objective class. We move beyond such studies by incorporating both objective and subjective class and the discrepancies between the two into the dependent variable. This explicitly models the discrepancy and provides novel description of the correlates of inflated, deflated, and concordant class perceptions.

Robert W. Hodge and Donald J. Treiman (1968) theorized that those whose objective class did not predict their subjective class were experiencing “status inconsistency.” Hout (2008) refers to subjective class “ambiguity” and “ambivalence.” While we do not contradict these views, we suggest that such discordance between subjective class identity and objective class position is likely to be patterned in sociologically meaningful ways. Hout (2008:38) explains that inconsistencies between objective and subjective class can be explained by imperfect correlations between income, education, and occupation (although these are more highly correlated than in previous decades) and that many sit at the border of social classes and might reasonably classify themselves above or below that border. Like Hout, we expect that education and income are likely to sway respondents to inflate or deflate. In addition, the competing identities of sex, marital status, race, and religion are likely to shape how one experiences and perceive one’s class (Hout 2008). Race is especially likely to shape class identification and is most likely to lead to class deflation because middle- and upper-class African Americans tend to perceive a “linked fate” with other and lower-class African Americans (Dawson 1994) and maintain social relations with those in poor neighborhoods and in more insecure economic positions (Patillo-McCoy 1999). Indeed, Hout (2008) shows that African Americans are much less likely to form a middle-class identity, even if they are objectively middle class.

Next, we examine the relationship between inflated or deflated social class perceptions and presidential vote choice. Building on the class analysis literature, we propose three hypotheses for how *differences* between Americans’ subjective and objective class positions should affect vote choice.

The first hypothesis can be called the “perceived economic interest” hypothesis. According to this hypothesis, inflators should be less likely to vote for Democratic candidates and deflators more likely than those with concordant class identities. This hypothesis is grounded in the class analysis

3. We experimented with analyses in which we account for the extent of inflation and deflation. For example, we differentiated between those who identify with a class one level above or below their objective class position and those who identify with a class two levels above or below. However, a crucial limitation of this approach is that the objectively middle class, by definition, are constrained to only one level of inflation or deflation. This prevents a consistent interpretation of the effects of class inflation and deflation.

literature, which demonstrates that voters' politics emerge from their material economic interests (Chan and Goldthorpe 2007; van der Waal et al. 2007). However, rather than being driven by objective reality, voters' interests are subjectively oriented. As Kelley and Evans (1995) explain, "People's subjective class identifications determine where they *think* their self interests lie, and therefore which political party best serves their interests" (p. 161; emphasis added). Thus, inflators falsely perceive their economic interests as consistent with more affluent higher classes and reject the Democratic platform (Frank 2004).<sup>4</sup> Conversely, deflators perceive the Democratic Party's commitment to government assistance and redistribution for lower classes is to their benefit.

The second hypothesis can be called the "cultural affinity" hypothesis. According to this hypothesis, deflators should vote based on socially conservative cultural issues like abortion (Clark 2001; van der Waal et al. 2007). Conversely, inflators should be more likely to vote Democratic. Several factors inspire this expectation. For one, the "social conservatism" potentially motivating deflators is driven by cultural wedge issues rather than economics and has been shown to be unassociated with income but predicted by education (van der Waal et al. 2007). Thus, those with higher objective class positions but low education may be prone to deflate and vote based upon cultural issues and those with lower objective class positions and high education may do the opposite. In addition, culturally conservative issues have increased in salience in recent decades in U.S. elections (Achterberg 2006), a trend that is consistent with claims that the Republican Party has been successful in framing itself as supporting "down to earth," "blue-collar" cultural values (Frank 2004). This may make Republican candidates especially appealing to those who place a premium on such cultural values and thus identify as a lower class than their objective position would predict (Lamont 2000). Further, if inflation is driven by a higher level of education than expected by one's objective class position, one can expect a preference for Democratic candidates among inflators. Just as Republicans benefit from the mobilization of cultural wedge issues, Democratic candidates may benefit from the liberalization of "civil rights" attitudes among the well-educated (Brooks 2000). Finally, deflators might be objectively middle or upper class, but have lower status and their status would lead them to identify as working or middle class. Tak Wing Chan and John H. Goldthorpe (2007) explain that such a status would be associated with authoritarian rather than libertarian values, and such values would predict Republican voting. Again, the converse leads one to expect inflators to vote Democratic.

Finally, it is reasonable to consider a null hypothesis for both deflators and inflators. Inflation and deflation may simply result from status inconsistency (Hodge and Treiman 1968; Hout 2008), and status inconsistency may lead to incoherent and unpredictable voting behavior. Inflators and deflators might be unable to discern their interests and may have contradictory views on politics. Further, inflators' and deflators' incorrect identifications of their objective social class may be evidence of a broader low information voter who does not lean Democratic or Republican consistently. Even if inflators and deflators are politically informed, they may simply hold multiple and contradictory identities (such as a high education but low income) that undermine consistent partisanship (Hout 2008). Therefore, it may be reasonable to expect deflators and inflators to not vote consistently in one direction.

## Methods

### *Sample and Techniques*

Data come from the American National Election Study (ANES) (Sapiro and Rosenstone 2004). The ANES surveys a nationally representative sample and collects information on demographics, voting behavior, and political attitudes. Surveys have been conducted every two years

4. Of course, this is similar to Marx's classic idea of "false consciousness." Because of the complications and problems associated with that concept (e.g., Jost 1995; Scott 1985), we chose not to explicitly build on it here.

since 1948. For this project, we restrict the analysis to presidential election years from 1972 through 2004. This marks the period after the realigning elections in the 1960s and thus focuses on the most recent trends in voting behavior. We do not analyze the 1996 survey because the ANES did not ask respondents about their subjective class identity in that year. In addition, we do not include the 2008 survey because the necessary occupational variables were not yet available. We study presidential elections because they draw higher turnout than congressional elections and thus provide a more complete sample of the American electorate. In addition, studying presidential elections is advantageous because they do not revolve around issues specific to local electorates and are less driven by incumbency. This ensures that our findings reflect national trends in voting behaviors.<sup>5</sup>

We first analyze the extent to which Americans have inflated and deflated perceptions and then utilize multinomial logistic regression to examine how inflation and deflation (versus concordance) is associated with key sociodemographic variables. We then employ logistic regression to model the likelihood that voters who either inflate or deflate their class will support the Democratic Party. We also incorporate a series of sociodemographic factors that have been linked to vote choice. Since we pool multiple election years in each model, we robustly cluster the errors by year using the Huber-White correction in all models presented here.

### *Dependent and Key Independent Variables*

In this study, we analyze two sets of dependent and independent variables. For our analysis of class inflation and deflation, the dependent variable is the difference between a person's subjective class identity and their objective class position. Subjective class identity is based on an ANES question in which respondents are asked to rate themselves as "working," "middle," or "upper middle" class, and we define objective class position based on the Erikson-Goldthorpe (EGP) class schema (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992a).

The EGP schema utilizes a Weberian approach to class analysis that groups individuals whose common market and work situations give them similar life chances.<sup>6</sup> While no measure of class position is truly objective, the schema overcomes many of the limitations associated with alternative definitions of social class. For example, many scholars define class based on income (e.g., Bartels 2008; Stonecash 2000), but this measure becomes problematic because it is not always clear which level of income is associated with a given social class category.<sup>7</sup> Further, there is evidence that occupation is actually a better predictor of permanent income than one's current income (Hauser and Warren 1997). Level of education is another proxy for class (Bartels 2006), but its validity is diminished because people with similar educational credentials often have very different life chances, attitudes, and behaviors.<sup>8</sup> Unlike those that view class as reducible to these simpler gradational measures of education or income, the EGP class schema is designed to emphasize commonalities in life chances of those located within particular occupational groups. The schema groups occupations into aggregate class categories ranging from upper-level managers to unskilled workers (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992a). Indeed, the class-voting literature has consistently shown significant effects of EGP class categories net of gradational measures like education and income (e.g., Manza and Brooks 1999). Further, the EGP schema is meant to distinguish class from status (Chan and Goldthorpe 2007).

5. Partly for these reasons, nearly all studies of class voting in the United States study presidential elections (e.g., Bartels 2006; Manza and Brooks 1999).

6. While Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992a:35) are reluctant to label their schema as Weberian, most believe that it belongs to the Weberian tradition of class analysis (Breen 2005).

7. Some choose to divide the income distribution into thirds, others utilize fifths, and others examine specific income thresholds (see Brooks and Brady 1999).

8. For example, in their analysis of voting behavior, Manza and Brooks (1999) find that managers and professionals, two occupational groups with similarly high levels of education, display sharply divergent voting patterns.

Several studies have demonstrated the validity of the EGP schema. Geoffrey Evans and Colin Mills (1998) evaluate the criterion and construct validity of the schema and find it performs well. Evans and Mills (2000) also establish that the primary class divisions identified by the EGP schema are associated with real life patterns of class formation. With a latent class analysis, Gunn Elisabeth Birkelund, Leo A. Goodman, and David Rose (1996) also support the EGP schema. These studies all justify the EGP schema as an objective measure of social class. Most important for our purposes, the EGP has been the predominant schema in the class-voting literature (Manza and Brooks 2008).

The use of the EGP schema does occasionally lead to challenges in interpretation. Of course, there are situations when one's occupational category is not the most salient determinant of his or her life chances. In addition, categorizing hundreds of occupations into as few as three groups is a significant methodological challenge and some measurement error is inevitable. However, even with these limitations, the EGP schema remains a useful tool for our analysis of class inflation, deflation, and vote choice. Given its widespread adoption in the class-voting literature (Manza and Brooks 2008), use of the EGP schema ensures that our project will be comparable with past work in this field. Such consistency is especially important because our focus on class inflation and deflation is a novel addition to research on class voting. Use of EGP ensures that any divergent results are not simply the product of an alternative social class measure.<sup>9</sup>

To analyze respondents' objective class position it is necessary to sort every occupation into one of the classes that make up the EGP schema (Ganzeboom and Treiman 1996). To facilitate comparison with the NES measure of subjective class identity, we employ a broad three-category version of the schema with categories for working class, middle class and upper-middle class.<sup>10</sup> We define working class as any occupation that falls into the classes of "unskilled manual," "skilled manual," "manual foremen," or low-level "clerical workers." We define the middle class as upper-level "clerical workers" and "lower-service" workers.<sup>11</sup> We differentiate between lower- and upper-clerical workers based on whether respondents have a college degree. We label those with a college degree as upper clerical (coded as middle class) and those without a degree are coded as lower clerical (coded as working class).<sup>12</sup> We define the upper-middle class as "higher service" workers.<sup>13</sup> Our coding of specific occupations into EGP categories is based primarily on Harry B. G. Ganzeboom and Donald J. Treiman's (1996) guidance for coding the International Standard Classification of Occupations 1988 into the EGP schema. Since the ANES reports occupations using U.S. Census occupation codes, we also utilize occupational descriptions provided by the U.S. Department of Labor (2007). In the ANES, the Census occupation codes come from one of the recent prior U.S. Censuses. As a result, we use the 1990 occupation codes for the 2004 and 2000 elections, the 1980 codes for the 1984–1992 elections, the 1970 codes for 1980 and 1976,

9. In analyses available on request, we test the robustness of our results to an alternative measure of objective social class. Instead of using EGP, we measure objective class based on educational attainment and reexamined the relationship between class inflation/deflation and voting. We categorized workers with a graduate degree as upper-middle class, those with a college degree as middle class, and those with less than a college degree as working class. Using this alternative definition of class, there are no major substantive changes in the association between inflation/deflation and Democratic vote choice from the results shown here.

10. Evans and Mills (1998) find no significant loss of information when compressing the seven-class EGP schema into four class categories. However, they reserve an entire category for supervisors of manual workers (class V), while our three category schema includes them with the working class. In this project, the format of ANES occupational data prevents such a distinction, but given the small proportion of manual supervisors in comparison to manual workers, it seems unlikely that consolidating these groups will produce significant problems.

11. In the terminology of the EGP schema, the "lower service" category refers to associate professionals, lower managers, and higher sales workers (Ganzeboom and Treiman 1996).

12. We replicated our analyses while classifying all clerical workers first as middle class and then as working class. The results using these alternative classifications are substantively consistent with the presented results.

13. Thus, we define the working class as classes IIIb, VI, V, or VII, the middle class as IIIa and II, and the upper-middle class as any occupations belonging to class I. As noted above, we differentiate between class IIIa and IIIb (lower and upper clerical) based on whether respondents have a college degree. Ganzeboom and Treiman (1996) do not attempt to code respondents into class IV, and so we exclude this class from our analysis.

**Table 2 • Descriptive Statistics in the American National Election Studies, 1972–2004<sup>a</sup>**

	Mean	SD
Democratic vote choice	.450	.498
Concordant identity	.524	.499
Inflated identity	.241	.428
Deflated identity	.235	.424
Subjective class identification	1.662	.705
Objective class position	1.680	.794
Less than high school	.143	.351
High school	.315	.465
Some college	.254	.435
Graduate school	.137	.344
Income	31804.03	19186.29
Female	.480	.500
Married	.655	.475
African American	.107	.309
Evangelical Protestant	.234	.423
Black Protestant	.087	.282
Mainline Protestant	.264	.441
Catholic	.279	.449
Jewish	.026	.159
Other religion	.038	.192

*N* = 5,020

<sup>a</sup>Excluding 1996.

and the ANES's 1972 codes for the 1972 election. Census occupation codes have three digits, but for recent elections the ANES only makes two digit data available. Thus, we utilize only the first two digits when coding occupations into EGP class categories.<sup>14</sup>

After coding all occupations into their objective EGP class, we assess whether there is a difference between each respondent's objective class position and their subjective class identity. As shown in Table 1, we designate whether this difference involves an inflated or deflated perception.<sup>15</sup> We then create the variables *inflate* and *deflate* to serve as the dependent variables for this part of our analysis. The independent variables for our examination of class inflation and deflation are the sociodemographic variables detailed below.

In the analysis of the relationship between class inflation or deflation and voting, the dependent variable is *presidential vote choice*. In the ANES survey, respondents are first asked whether or not they voted in the most recent presidential election. Those who did vote are then asked which candidate they voted for and their responses are coded based on the candidate's partisan affiliation (Democrat = 1; Republican = 0). For this project, we exclude respondents who voted for third party candidates or who did not remember their presidential vote choice (Manza and Brooks 1999). The key independent variables for this portion of the analyses are class inflation or deflation, and we again utilize *inflate* and *deflate* as binary measures. Descriptive statistics for all variables are displayed in Table 2.

14. When a two-digit category includes occupations that would normally be placed into separate EGP classes, we determine the proper position based on which EGP class is appropriate for the majority of occupations. In order to settle any discrepancies between years, we give priority to the 1990 coding schema (Brady et al. 2009). The primary consequence of this method is that it hinders precise distinctions between skilled and unskilled manual workers, but given that we employ a broad version of the EGP schema that groups both types of workers into the working class, this rarely has an impact on an occupation's classification.

15. We rank classes hierarchically with working class on the bottom, followed by middle class, and then upper-middle class at the top.

### *Other Independent Variables*

We include several sociodemographic variables that are commonly used to explain patterns in class identification and voting behavior (Brooks, Nieuwbeerta, and Manza 2006; Hout 2008; Manza and Brooks 1999).<sup>16</sup> We control for education and income. Education is measured with dummy variables for *less than high school*, *high school* degree, *some college*, and *graduate school*, with the reference group being those with a four-year college degree. *Household income* is measured as a continuous variable that has been scaled to 1984 dollars using the Consumer Price Index for the year prior to the survey. We also control for key demographic factors. We create the variables *race* (1 = black; 0 = nonblack), *married* (1 = married; 0 = single, never married, divorced, or widowed), and *female* (1 = female; 0 = male). In addition, we add controls for religion using the schema proposed by Brian Steensland and colleagues (2000). This schema groups religious preference into seven categories: *Evangelical Protestant*, *black Protestant*, *Mainline Protestant*, *Catholic*, *Jewish*, *other religion*, and *no religion* (which is used as the reference category).

Throughout, we control for time with dummy variables for each election year. Finally, to test for a trend in the association between inflate or deflate and vote choice, we later include linear year and interactions of linear year and inflate and deflate.

## **Results**

### *Differences between Subjective and Objective Class*

Before analyzing the relationship between class inflation or deflation and vote choice, we first assess whether subjective class identities do, in fact, differ from objective class positions. Table 3 presents the extent of inflated and deflated perceptions of class. Among those who can be objectively categorized as working class, approximately 37 percent have an inflated perception.<sup>17</sup> Thus, while the majority of the working class has concordant perceptions of their social class, a substantial percentage inflates their class. For the objective middle class, almost 50 percent have a concordant class identification, while nearly 33 percent have a deflated perception and about 17 percent have an inflated perception. Finally, among respondents who can be objectively classified as upper-middle class, more than 71 percent deflate their class position.<sup>18</sup> In sum, over two-thirds of the upper-middle class have a deflated perception, only half of the middle class have concordant perceptions, and more than a third of the working class have inflated perceptions.

After establishing the substantial presence of inflated and deflated perceptions, we use multinomial logistic regression to predict inflation and deflation across key sociodemographic characteristics. As shown in Table 4, respondents with a high school education or some college are significantly more likely to have inflated perceptions (relative to a college degree) compared to concordance or deflation. Those with less than a high school degree are significantly more likely to inflate than deflate. In contrast, those with a graduate degree are significantly less likely to inflate rather than be concordant. Income significantly increases the odds of inflation relative to concordance or deflation. Being female increases the odds of inflated perception (relative to men), but being married is not significantly linked to whether one has an inflated perception.

16. We also experimented with controls for opposition to abortion, support for government aid to African Americans and minorities, and support for women's role in the workplace. While such "cultural wedge" issues were significant predictors of vote choice, they were mainly insignificant for predicting inflate/deflate and their inclusion did not alter the main conclusions about the association between inflate and deflate and vote choice. Due to inconsistencies in the presence of the relevant survey items across ANES waves, the inclusion of the cultural wedge issues resulted in a substantial loss of cases. As a result, we omit them here.

17. This 37 percent of working-class inflators breaks down into 30.96 percent who see themselves as middle class and 5.94 percent who identify as upper-middle class.

18. This 71 percent of upper-middle-class deflators breaks down into 44.80 percent who see themselves as middle class and 26.69 percent who identify as working class.

**Table 3 • Number and Percentage of Respondents with Deflated, Concordant, and Inflated Perceptions of Social Class, by Objective Class Position 1972–2004<sup>a</sup>**

	<i>Deflate</i> (percent)	<i>Concordant</i> (percent)	<i>Inflate</i> (percent)
Objective working class	–	1,667 (63.10)	975 (36.90)
Objective middle class	441 (32.79)	671 (49.89)	233 (17.32)
Objective upper-middle class	742 (71.48)	296 (28.52)	–
Total	1,183 (23.54)	2,634 (52.42)	1,208 (24.04)

*N* = 5,025

<sup>a</sup>Excluding 1996.

Being African American reduces the odds of inflated class perception relative to concordance by a factor of more than 3.0 and relative to deflation by a factor of about 3.5 (relative to other races).<sup>19</sup> These appear to be the largest effects of any variable. Interestingly, several of the measures of religious affiliation do not inflate perceptions. The exception is that black and Mainline Protestants are more likely to inflate rather than deflate.

Table 4 also displays the odds ratios for having a deflated perception of social class across the same variables. Americans with a high school education or less and those with some college experience are significantly less likely to have deflated perceptions of their social class than those with a college degree. Also, having a graduate degree reduces the odds of deflated class perception. Though income significantly predicts inflation, it is not significantly associated with deflation, relative to concordance. Moreover, women do not differ significantly from men in their likelihood of deflating and married people are not significantly more or less likely to deflate. Though African Americans are much less likely to inflate, they are not significantly more likely to deflate, compared to those who hold concordant identities. Compared to those with no religious affiliation, Evangelical, black and Mainline Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish respondents are significantly less likely to have deflated perceptions of their social class.

### *Class Inflation and Deflation and Vote Choice*

Before proceeding to the multivariate analysis, it is worthwhile to examine the descriptive patterns in vote choice across those who have inflated and deflated class perceptions. Table 5 displays these patterns. Among inflators, about 59 percent vote for Republican presidential candidates and 41 percent support Democrats. This difference meets a .01 significance threshold (see row *p*-values). Deflators vote in a similar pattern, with almost 57 percent voting Republican and 43 percent voting Democrat. This difference is also significant. Table 5 also compares differences in Democratic and Republican voting *between* those who inflate versus those who deflate. This comparison reveals that there are not statistically significant differences in vote choice between inflators and deflators (see column *p*-values).

In Table 6, we present logistic regression models for the association between class inflation and deflation and vote choice. Model 1 examines the link between having an inflated perception of one's social class, having a deflated perception, and Democratic vote choice (also controlling for year with dummy variables included but not shown). In this model, people who inflate their class

19. For odds less than one, we interpret the magnitude of reduced odds in terms of inverse odds ( $-1/\text{odds}$ ).

**Table 4 • Multinomial Logistic Regression of Class Inflation and Deflation, 1972–2004<sup>a</sup>: Odds Ratios and T-Scores**

	<i>Inflate versus Concordant (t-scores)</i>	<i>Deflate versus Concordant (t-scores)</i>	<i>Inflate versus Deflate (t-scores)</i>
Less than high school	1.066 (.46)	.159** (-7.75)	6.710** (10.22)
High school	1.520** (3.87)	.309** (-11.21)	4.922** (15.32)
Some college	1.842** (4.70)	.671** (-3.32)	2.744** (6.90)
College (reference)			
Graduate school	.577** (-3.38)	.613** (-2.83)	.979 (-.37)
Income	1.001** (5.96)	1.001 (1.21)	1.001** (6.09)
Male (reference)			
Female	1.400** (4.40)	.959 (-.48)	1.459** (2.74)
Not married (reference)			
Married	.915 (-1.03)	.919 (-1.54)	.998 (-.07)
Non-African American (reference)			
African American	.327** (-7.66)	1.141 (.62)	.286** (-4.54)
No religion (reference)			
Evangelical Protestant	.765 (-1.93)	.753* (-2.30)	1.015 (.82)
Black Protestant	1.026 (.10)	.514** (-3.26)	1.997* (1.97)
Mainline Protestant	1.024 (.16)	.718* (-2.17)	1.426* (2.09)
Catholic	.939 (-.45)	.748* (-2.35)	1.256 (1.16)
Jewish	1.013 (.04)	.606* (-2.24)	1.671 (1.44)
Other religion	.885 (-.56)	.865 (-1.44)	1.024 (.14)

*N* = 5,020

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  (two-tailed tests)

<sup>a</sup>Excluding 1996.

Notes: Constants not shown. Models also include dummy variables for election years. Odds greater than 1.000 but less than 1.001 were rounded to 1.001.

**Table 5 • Levels of Presidential Vote Choice for Those with Deflated and Inflated Class Perceptions 1972–2004<sup>a</sup>**

	<i>Republican</i>	<i>Democrat</i>	<i>P</i>
Inflate	58.77	41.23	.000
Deflate	56.56	43.44	.000
<i>P</i>	.274	.274	

*N* = 5,020

<sup>a</sup>Excluding 1996.

Note: The row *p*-values display a test of the difference in Republican versus Democratic voting among inflators and among deflators. The column *p*-values display a test of differences in Republican voting between inflators and deflators and a test of Democratic voting between inflators and deflators.

**Table 6 • Logistic Regression of Democratic Vote Choice on Class Inflation and Deflation and Other Variables in U.S. Presidential Elections, 1972–2004<sup>a</sup>: Odds Ratios and T-Scores**

	Model 1 (t-scores)	Model 2 (t-scores)	Model 3 (t-scores)	Model 4 (t-scores)
Inflate	.774** (-3.00)	.844* (-2.28)	.936 (-.79)	.998 (-.02)
Deflate	.828 (-1.69)	.932 (-.68)	.925 (-.77)	.828 (-.90)
Less than high school		1.792* (2.59)	1.400 (1.46)	1.405 (1.43)
High school		1.265 (1.63)	1.123 (.77)	1.140 (.83)
Some college		1.104 (.86)	.992 (-.07)	.983 (-.15)
College (reference)				
Graduate school		1.380* (2.51)	1.533** (2.93)	1.552** (3.03)
Income			.999** (-4.30)	.999** (-4.42)
Male (reference)				
Female		1.429** (5.83)	1.355** (4.66)	1.332** (4.26)
Not married (reference)				
Married		.754** (-5.06)	.941 (-.77)	.940 (-.86)
Non-African American (reference)				
African American			15.431** (10.45)	14.184** (10.51)
No religion (reference)				
Evangelical Protestant		.477** (-10.41)	.468** (-9.34)	.513** (-9.27)
Black Protestant		7.507** (16.74)	.756 (-1.25)	.864 (-.70)
Mainline Protestant		.704** (-3.21)	.759* (-2.41)	.811 (-1.94)
Catholic		1.056 (1.08)	1.153* (2.05)	1.217** (2.70)
Jewish		3.528** (9.74)	4.408** (10.35)	4.694** (13.17)
Other religion		.906 (-.91)	.954 (-.38)	1.021 (.18)
Linear year				1.051 (1.30)
Inflate*year				.982 (-.67)
Deflate*year				1.034 (.89)
BIC	-35871.175	-36388.116	-36601.736	-36577.257

*N* = 5,020

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  (two-tailed tests)

<sup>a</sup>Excluding 1996.

Notes: Constants not shown. Models 1 through 3 also include dummy variables for election years. Odds less than 1.000 but greater than .999 were rounded to .999

are significantly less likely than those with concordant class perceptions to vote for Democratic presidential candidates. Having an inflated perception reduces the odds of voting Democratic by a factor of about 1.3. In contrast, having a deflated perception of one's class position is not significantly related to their likelihood of voting Democratic.

Model 2 of Table 6 adds controls for education, sex, marital status, and religion, most of which show predictable results.<sup>20</sup> Female, black Protestant, and Jewish respondents are significantly more likely to vote Democratic. Married, Evangelical Protestant, and Mainline Protestant respondents are significantly less likely to vote Democratic. Consistent with previous research, respondents with less than a high school degree or a graduate degree are significantly more likely to vote Democratic. Surprisingly, however, these models that include inflate and deflate, fail to show a significant relationship between vote choice and the other educational categories. We interpret this result to suggest that part of the reason for educational differences in vote choice is because of differences in inflation and deflation.

Even with the addition of these controls, the coefficient for class inflation remains significantly negative. With these controls, having an inflated class perception reduces the odds of voting Democratic by a factor of about 1.185. The partial attenuation of this effect from Model 1, and given the results in Table 4, suggests that the relationship between class inflation and vote choice is partially due to voting differences by sex and education.

Model 3 adds controls for income and race to Model 2. Income has a significant negative association with vote choice, and African American respondents are significantly more likely to vote Democratic. After controlling for these factors, the relationship between class inflation and vote choice is not significant. Thus, the initial finding that those who inflate are more likely to vote Republican can be explained by differences in income and race. Recall Table 4 shows that income increases, and being African American, reduces the likelihood of class inflation.

One other set of findings from Model 3 deserves mention. Consistent with previous research, income is negatively associated with Democratic vote choice while the coefficient for having a graduate degree is significantly positive (Achterberg 2006; Brooks and Brady 1999; Manza and Brooks 1999; van der Waal et al. 2007). Indeed, it is well established that higher income voters tend to vote Republican and that highly educated voters tend to vote Democratic (Abramson et al. 2002). Yet, perhaps more interesting is that the *only* significant education coefficient is for graduate degree. Though the EGP schema has traditionally been used to distinguish occupational class from gradational measures like education and income, our results suggest that these factors are interrelated. This emphasizes the difficulty in distinguishing the role of various components of life chances for voting behavior (see Achterberg 2006; van der Waal et al. 2007).

Finally, the fourth model tests whether the effects of inflate and deflate increase or decrease over time. We remove the dummies for election years and include linear year and interactions between linear year and inflate and deflate. Neither of the interaction effects are significant and the main effects of inflate and deflate remain insignificant. In analyses available upon request, we included linear year in every model and observed no significant effects. Finally, we experimented with interactions of inflate and deflate with the year dummies and decomposed the models by year. However, we found no clear pattern of change in the effects of inflate and deflate over time.

## Discussion

This study evaluates the extent to which American voters' subjective class identities differ from their objective class positions and whether such differences are associated with vote choice. Overall, we conclude that nonconcordant class perceptions are common. Also, we find that although there is an initial association between class inflation and voting Republican, this association is not

20. In analyses available upon request, we also control for age, but this does not have substantive effect on the results.

robust once we control for race and income. In turn, we propose that these results speak to important debates in class analysis, public opinion, voting, and other fields.

We first examine the extent to which Americans' subjective class identities differ from their objective class positions. As Table 3 shows, a significant discrepancy does exist between subjective and objective class. Consistent with existing research (e.g., Adair 2001; Evans and Kelley 2004), we find that this discrepancy is driven by the fact that when given the chance to subjectively rate their social class, a disproportionate number of Americans place themselves in the middle class. Table 3 reveals that the surplus of middle-class identifiers is made up of individuals from both ends of the social hierarchy. Among the working class, close to 40 percent have inflated class identifications. In addition, a striking 70 percent of the upper-middle class deflates their class positions.

Previous research suggests that discordant class identities reflect the imperfect correlations between occupation, income, and education, and result because of status inconsistency, ambivalence, and ambiguity (Hout 2008). We do not contradict these claims, but also demonstrate that discordance is patterned in sociologically meaningful ways. Our results highlight the especially important role of income, education, and race. As shown in Table 4, higher incomes lead one to inflate their subjective class identification above their objective class position. This is consistent with Hout's (2008) suggestion that imperfect correlations between class and income explain some of the divergence. Further, education significantly predicts whether one will have inflated, deflated, or concordant perceptions. Generally, those without a college degree are significantly more likely than those with a college degree to hold inflated perceptions.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, those with graduate degrees are significantly less likely to inflate or deflate, and thus are much more likely to be concordant. Thus, higher levels of educational attainment are associated with a greater likelihood of concordance, a notion that seemingly validates those who contend that individuals on the lower rungs of the social ladder do not have a realistic sense of their ranking in the social hierarchy (e.g., Frank 2004). Our results are consistent with the possibility that the process of getting an education actually helps make one more aware of their objective class position. Alternatively, this finding might be linked to Evans and Kelley's (2004) view that people base their class identities on their immediate surroundings. If people with low levels of education are more likely to share networks with others of low education, then they may perceive themselves to be relatively well-off compared to their surroundings and form inflated class identities.

Race is also clearly linked to patterns of class inflation and deflation. Compared to other races, African Americans are much less likely to inflate relative to being concordant or deflating. A possible explanation for the low occurrence of class inflation among African Americans is that because of the persistence of racial discrimination in housing markets, education, and the workplace (Oliver and Shapiro 1996; Pager 2007; Pager and Quillian 2005), the life chances of many African Americans may be less favorable than their occupationally based objective class position would predict. Due to these diminished life chances, African Americans might be less likely to feel that they belong to a relatively high-ranking social class. Alternatively, as an extension of Evans and Kelley's (2004) argument, it is possible that exposure to discrimination causes African Americans to perceive themselves to be relatively worse off than those around them. As such, they would be less likely to subjectively identify with those of a higher status and thus less likely to inflate their social class. Further, objectively middle-class African Americans might be uncomfortable identifying with the upper-middle class and working-class African Americans might be uncomfortable identifying with the middle class because of a sense of racial solidarity (or intergenerational origins) (Dawson 1994). Finally, these findings could be complemented by a desire among African Americans to separate themselves from what they perceive as white middle-class egoism (Lamont 2000; Lamont and Molnár 2002).

21. Those with low education also tend to be significantly less likely to hold deflated class identities but this is less useful to discuss because this study does not analyze subjects belonging to classes that rank lower than the working class. Those with low levels of education are more likely to occupy the bottom of the social hierarchy, and such individuals cannot, by definition, hold deflated impressions of their social class.

After assessing the extent to which Americans' subjective class identities diverge from their objective class positions, we analyze the link between inflation and deflation and vote choice. We consider three hypotheses for the relationship between nonconcordance and voting. The perceived economic interest hypothesis predicts that inflators will vote Republican and deflators will vote Democratic. The cultural affinity hypothesis predicts that deflators will vote Republican and inflators will vote Democratic. The null effects hypothesis expects no significant effects because of status inconsistency. The initial results provide some support for the perceived economic interest hypothesis and the cultural affinity hypothesis. Consistent with the perceived economic interest hypothesis, the initial descriptive patterns show that respondents who inflate were more likely to vote Republican than those with concordant class perceptions. However, contrary to this hypothesis, deflators are not more likely to vote Democratic. Consistent with the cultural affinity hypothesis, the initial pattern suggests that deflators are more likely to vote Republican (see Table 5). However, contrary to the cultural affinity hypothesis, inflators are not more likely to vote Democratic. Despite these intriguing initial patterns, the final models lend the most support for the null hypothesis. Once income and race are taken into account, inflation and deflation are not significantly associated with presidential vote choice (see Table 6).

One of the most interesting implications of these results concern racial differences in voting behavior. Support for Democratic candidates among African American voters who rarely inflate their social class is key to explaining the initial association between class inflation and Republican vote choice. This association is driven by the fact that African Americans are both much less likely to inflate and much less likely to vote Republican. The fact that race plays such a strong role in explaining patterns of class inflation provides support for scholars like Lamont (1992, 2000) who highlight differing experiences between African Americans and whites in class identity formation. Thus, future research that seeks to explain the relationship between class inflation, deflation, and behavior should pay attention to differing patterns of inflation between whites and blacks.

This study has several additional implications for research on class voting. First, our results raise doubts about the notion that the growing tendency for the white working class to vote Republican (Brady et al. 2009) is primarily the product of confusion about their true economic interests (Frank 2004). If this were true, one would expect whites who are objectively working class, but identify with the middle or even upper-middle class, to be a driving force in the relationship between inflation and Republican voting. However, because much of the initial relationship between class inflation and vote choice stems from low levels of inflation among African Americans, it seems unlikely that it is simply white working-class inflation that is driving the increased Republican support among white working-class men (Brady et al. 2009). Second, our analyses show that class deflators are not significantly more likely to vote for Republicans or for Democrats. Thus, even though Democrats target many policies to appeal to individuals in disadvantaged economic positions and Republicans continue to emphasize "blue collar" values (Frank 2004), people who identify with a lower class position than they actually occupy have not formed consistent partisan attachments.

Third, our results show that objective and subjective social class are interrelated with education and income. This article follows convention in the class-voting literature by treating class as separate from gradational measures that also predict life chances (Manza and Brooks 1999). Building on that convention, we assess the role of class inflation and deflation net of education and income. Yet, the class-voting literature might make progress by embracing the reality of the interdependence of gradational measures, and objective and subjective class. Table 4 shows that those without a college degree and those with a higher income are more likely to inflate, while those with graduate degrees are less likely to inflate. Tables 5 and 6 provide at least initial evidence that inflators tend to vote Republican. While others have consistently shown a strong positive association between education and Democratic vote choice, our analyses with inflation and deflation in the model show fewer differences. Thus, our results suggest that education's relationship to vote choice is partially mediated by inflation. At the same time, however, we find that inflation is not a significant predictor in models that control for income. As we discussed earlier (e.g., Hout 2008), inflation and deflation

are partly products of the imperfect correlations between income, education, and objective and subjective class. Like Peter Achterberg (2006) and Jeroen van der Waal and colleagues (2007), we agree that the class-voting literature needs more research on the differing effects of class, education, and income, and we would add inflation and deflation to that list.

We hope this study encourages further interest in subjective class identity in the field of class analysis. Our analyses reveal that there are clearly deep limitations to utilizing subjective class identity as a proxy or stand-in for objective class position. Nevertheless, because so many Americans identify with a class that differs from their objective class position, subjective class identity is more than just a form of Marxian “false consciousness” that fails to reflect objective life chances (Jost 1995). Instead, Americans’ subjective class identities should be treated as a significant social fact that has potential to shape social behaviors differently but on par with objective class position. Thus, future studies of the effects of social class would benefit by incorporating both subjective and objective social class, as well as accounting for the divergences between these two factors. It is also worth exploring the extent to which political behaviors might actually influence class identification. For example, it is possible that the decision to mobilize for a political party motivates class inflation or deflation as individuals seek to form a consistent self-concept. Although our analyses do not suggest that presidential vote choice predicts inflation or deflation, it is possible that this effect is captured by broader measures of political engagement such as volunteering for a preferred candidate.

Lastly, our analyses suggest that still more research could help unravel the complex relationships between class and voting. Our results add to this literature by detailing the extent to which differences between Americans’ subjective and objective class are tied to voting behavior. However, our focus on class inflation and deflation does not appear to explain trends such as the increasing tendency for working-class white men to vote Republican (Brady et al. 2009). Since others suggest that trends in class voting cannot be fully explained by income, education, region, religion, or even cultural issues like attitudes on abortion, the complex factors driving heterogeneous patterns of class voting remain a worthy research question. Such work must make sure to account for the fact that subjective class identity and objective class position are distinct concepts and that each have the potential to influence social life.

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